

UPCOMING DISCUSSIONS

The Uncommon Reader

Discussion Date: 1-23-10

Double Take

Discussion Date: 2-6-10

Ghost of Hannah Mendes

Discussion Date: 2-27-10

Blue as the Lake

Discussion Date: 3-20-10

English Creek

Discussion Date: 4-10-10

Bel Canto

Discussion Date: 5-1-10

Sail Ho!

-- Exploring the Age of Sail

Adult Summer Reading Club

May 24 – July 24



Out Stealing Horses

Discussion Date: 8-14-10

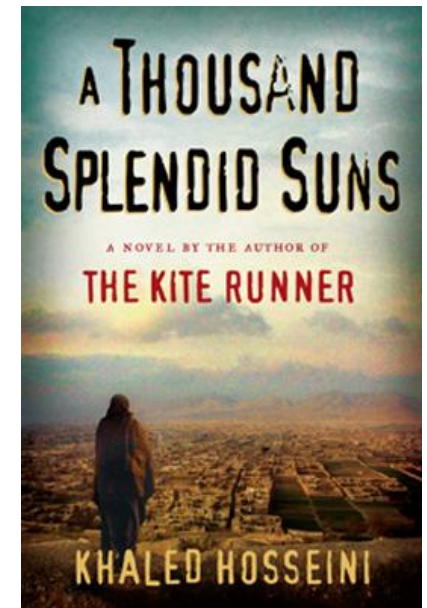
March

Discussion Date: 10-16-10

Brown Bag Book Club



Dig in & Discuss



Saturday, Jan. 9, 2010

Noon – 2pm

Activity Room

Lodi Public Library

201 W. Locust St.

Call 333-5503 for details

Bring a
Lunch!



Discussion Questions Courtesy of
www.us.penguingroup.com

Discussion Guide designed by
Sandy Smith
Lodi Public Library

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The phrase “a thousand splendid
suns,” from the poem by Saib-e-
Tabrizi, is quoted twice in the novel
– once as Laila’s family prepares to
leave Kabul, and again when she
decides to return there from
Pakistan. It is also echoed in one of
the final lines: “Miriam is in Laila’s
own heart, where she shines with
the bursting radiance of a thousand
suns.” Discuss the thematic
significance of this phrase.
2. Mariam’s mother tells her: “Women
like us. We endure. It’s all we have.”
Discuss how this sentiment informs
Mariam’s life and how it relates to
the larger themes of the novel.
3. By the time Laila is rescued from the
rubble of her home by Rasheed and
Mariam, Mariam’s marriage has
become a miserable existence of
neglect and abuse. Yet when she
realizes that Rasheed intends to
marry Laila, she reacts with outrage.
Given that Laila’s presence actually
tempers Rasheed’s abuse, why is
Mariam so hostile toward her?
4. Laila’s friendship with Mariam
begins when she defends Mariam
from a beating by Rasheed. Why
does Laila take this action, despite
the contempt Mariam has
consistently shown her?
5. Growing up, Laila feels that her
mother’s love is reserved for her two
brothers. “People,” she decides,
“shouldn’t be allowed to have new
children if they’d already given away
all their love to their old ones.” How
does this sentiment inform Laila’s
reaction to becoming pregnant with
Rasheed’s child? What lessons from
her childhood does Laila apply in
raising her own children?
6. At several points in the story,
Mariam and Laila pass themselves
off as mother and daughter. What is
the symbolic importance of this
subterfuge? In what ways is
Mariam’s and Laila’s relationship
with each other informed by their
relationships with their own
mothers?
7. One of the Taliban judges at
Mariam’s trial tells her, “God has
made us different, you women and
us men. Our brains are different. You
are not able to think like we can.
Western doctors and their science
have proven this.” What is the irony
in this statement? How is irony
employed throughout the novel?
8. Laila’s father tells her, “You’re a very,
very bright girl. Truly you are. You
can be anything that you want.”
Discuss Laila’s relationship with her
father. What aspects of his character
does she inherit? In what ways is she
different?
9. Mariam refuses to see visitors while
she is imprisoned, and she calls no
witnesses at her trial. Why does she
make these decisions?
10. The driver who takes Babi, Laila, and
Tariq to the giant stone Buddhas
above the Bamiyan Valley describes
the crumbling fortress of Shahr-e-
Zohak as “the story of our country,
one invader after another... we’re like
those walls up there. Battered, and
nothing pretty to look at, but still
standing.” Discuss the metaphorical
import of this passage as it relates to
Miriam and Laila. In what ways does
their story reflect the larger story of
Afghanistan’s troubled history?
11. Among other things, the Taliban
forbid “writing books, watching
films, and painting pictures.” Yet
despite this edict, the film *Titanic*
becomes a sensation on the black
market. Why would people risk the
Taliban’s violent reprisals for a taste
of popcorn entertainment? What do
the Taliban’s restrictions on such
material say about the power of
artistic expression and the threat it
poses to repressive political regimes?
12. While the first three parts of the
novel are written in the past tense,
the final part is written in present
tense. What do you think was the
author’s intent in making this shift?
How does it change the effect of this
final section?